May 28, 2020 – Weill’s Street Scene

Kurt Weill’s “American opera” Street Scene opened on Broadway on January 9, 1947. With a huge cast of singers and actors, it’s rarely been revived outside the opera house, since many of its roles require voices equally at home in Puccini or Verdi. Having been forced to leave his native Germany in the 1930s, the composer of Three Penny Opera and Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny reinvented himself on Broadway with Knickerbocker Holiday, Lady in the Dark, and One Touch of Venus before returning, albeit briefly, to grand opera.

Street Scene takes the inhabitants of a crowded tenement building during one particular oppressively hot summer day in New York City and lets us see them as individuals: the gossipy women who lean out of their windows to watch everyone passing by; Sam Kaplan (tenor Jerry Hadley) and Rosé Murrant (soprano Angelina Réaux), young and in love and frightened to death of what the future holds; Rose's father, Frank (bass-baritone Samuel Ramey), who passionately loves his wife Anna (soprano Josephine Barstow) but knows she is having an affair with the milkman; the black janitor Henry (baritones Ben Holt and Bruce Hubbard), who lives in the apartment house with the white people, but has his own dreams as an outsider; Mrs. Buchanan and her nervous husband who are having a baby; Jenny, coming home from her graduation, et al.

John Mauceri conducts the Scottish Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this 1991 Decca/London recording.

From a Lexington Opera production, here's the delightful “Ice Cream Sextet":
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bh8sYgzNFWE.

As a bonus, we'll hear German chanteuse Ute Lemper sing three songs from Weill's 1941 show Lady in the Dark.

Next Thursday, June 4th, please join me for a 1964 recording of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute), a fairy tale masking a Masonic allegory, with Fritz Wunderlich, Evelyn Lear, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Roberta Peters and Franz Crass in principal roles. Karl Böhm conducts..

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We’re streamed online world-wide at http://www.theclassicalstation.org, and you can listen on WCPE’s Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the WCPE Opera House